



## **Opening Address**

**Senator Michael R. Gibbons, President Pro Tem**  
**Second Regular Session, 94<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**  
**January 9, 2008**

Lt. Governor Kinder, members of the Missouri Senate, our families, friends, and people of Missouri:

We are honored by your presence Lt. Governor, so soon after the loss of your mother, and on behalf of the entire Senate family, we extend our deepest sympathies.

We are gathered again in this magnificent chamber to start another session of work for the people of Missouri. This is an important year and we have much to do. Yes, it is an election year. Nationally, it is the first presidential campaign in 56 years that does not include an incumbent president or vice president, and it appears to be wide open on both sides. In Missouri, five out of the six statewide offices are on the ballot, as well as half of our chamber and the entire House. Some of our members are running for reelection, some others are seeking new offices, and four of us are term-limited.

But there is something more important facing us in the first four and a half months of 2008 - that is doing the work of the Legislature to make the lives of the people we serve better. Political pundits say nothing much will happen here this year. We owe it to the people of Missouri to prove them wrong.

It is fitting that we begin in January, because this is the time of year that exudes hope and optimism. The New Year is here, and all things are possible. We meet people every day who come here as advocates, regardless of past disappointments, who believe this is the year their issue will succeed. We owe it to the people who care so much that they travel here to share their ideas to listen to them and take action where we can.

Were we elected simply to engage in political posturing? To test the wind or react to the latest poll? Or, are we here to give voice to the hopes and dreams of the people and look for those opportunities to make life better for the people we represent?

The answer, of course, is up to us.

We owe the people being taxed out of their homes our best effort to protect them from tax increases caused by reassessment.

We owe the lawful residents of Missouri our best effort to protect their safety, jobs and benefits, rather than reward illegal immigrants with jobs and public support at the taxpayers' expense.

We owe the people our best effort to help them find and afford health insurance through a marketplace that puts them in the driver's seat when it comes to healthcare decisions for their families.

These are some of the concerns that people bring up to me from all around our state. It's not a game to the people at home; they expect us to fix these problems.

We must give our best effort. The people deserve it.

As we sit in this chamber, sometimes it is easy to overlook the messages that surround us. So let's consider the stained glass and paintings our forbearers put here some 80 years ago to speak to us every day.

On your right, there's Daniel Boone at the Judgment Tree in St. Charles County considering justice for a man accused of stealing; then Jefferson greeting Lewis and Clark on the porch of the White House upon their return from their Great Expedition to the West. To your left is our first United States Senator, Thomas Hart Benton, giving a speech in St. Louis in 1849 in support of Westward Expansion; and next to that is Frank Blair, who was running for the U.S. Senate giving a speech at Louisiana, Missouri, after he had been threatened that he would be killed if he showed up to speak because of his support for the repeal of the loyalty oath required after the Civil War. Above me is Hernando DeSoto who landed in the Spanish Region of Florida and led his men up the Mississippi River looking for riches.

In the seven years I've had the privilege of working in this chamber, I've thought a lot about these historic figures and what they have in common. What I believe they have in common is they were all, in their own way, courageous explorers enduring hardships through the unknown in pursuit of their vision for a better future.

These works of art are here to challenge us every day as we work through the unknowns of our time. They challenge us to be courageous, confront the unknown and act to secure a better future for all the people of Missouri.

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, we can take our cases to the people and let them judge how we have done. But from now until May 16<sup>th</sup>, I challenge all of us to work hard together to better the lives of the people of Missouri.

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